

Paladins with Class

By Skip Williams



Few **D&D** veterans are ambivalent about the paladin. To her fans, she is a paragon of virtue and a dauntless foe of all that is evil. To her detractors, she is a vain, obnoxious proselytizer with an obsession about glory. Both viewpoints have some truth in them, but the negative view is based primarily on badly played paladins.

The Pros and Cons of a Paladin

The paladin's wide range of abilities allows her to stand firm against evil of all sorts.

Paladin Assets

The paladin class provides access to a wide array of powers, from superior combat ability to divine spells. Below are several assets you have going for you when you play a paladin.

- **High Hit Points:** The paladin's 10-sided Hit Dice let her absorb lots of damage and keep right on going.
- **Good Armor Class:** The fact that the paladin can wear any kind of armor and use any kind of shield usually gives her an impressive Armor Class. This factor combined with her high hit points makes for a great defensive package.
- **Good Attack Bonus:** A paladin's base attack bonus is +1 per level, which is the best in the game. Thus, she can dish out damage as well as she can take it.
- **Good Fortitude Saves:** A paladin uses the best save progression in the game for Fortitude saves (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). This natural resilience helps her resist most effects that attack her body, such as poison, polymorphing, and energy draining.
- **Good Weapon Selection:** Because a paladin can use any simple or martial weapon, she has access to some of the best weapons in the game.
- **Supernatural Powers:** A paladin's many supernatural abilities provide her with both offensive and defensive benefits. She begins play with the ability to deal extra damage to evil creatures, sense evil creatures and magic nearby, and heal wounds. As she attains higher levels, she gains the ability to resist magical attacks through sheer force of will, inspire courage in her allies, and drive off or destroy undead creatures.
- **Divine Health:** A paladin is immune to mundane diseases.
- **Spells:** As a paladin attains higher levels, she gains the ability to cast a small number of divine spells that can improve her combat ability, ease injuries, and reveal hidden information.
- **Special Mount:** At 5th level, a paladin gains the ability to summon a special mount (usually a warhorse) that is unusually intelligent, strong, and loyal.

Paladin Weaknesses

The paladin's many advantages come at a price. Here are a few of the disadvantages you should keep in mind if you're considering a paladin character.

- **Poor Reflex and Will Saves:** Paladins have the worst progression in the game for Reflex and Will saves (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). Thus, they aren't so great at getting out of the way when the situation gets rough, nor can they easily shake off assaults on their minds, although the divine grace ability makes up for this weakness to some extent.
- **Low Mobility:** A paladin's reliance on heavy armor makes her a slow mover on the battlefield.
- **Code of Conduct:** A paladin must maintain a lawful good alignment and vow never to commit an act of evil. Furthermore, she must always respect legitimate authority, act honorably, help people in need, and punish those who harm or threaten innocents. In short, the paladin lives by rules when most of her enemies do not.

Playing a Classy Paladin

Great paladins usually use the following techniques. So if you're playing one of these characters, try to build your strategy around these concepts.

Set a Good Example

Great paladins are more concerned with justice and charity than with meting out punishments and preaching about other people's moral failings. In fact, since most paladins have high Charisma scores, they tend to be very likable characters. One appropriate way to achieve that effect is to be consistently honest and unselfish, and to place the welfare and safety of others before your own.

Always Lead

Your natural place in a party is in the front rank, where you can both take the fight to the enemy and place yourself between the opposition and the more vulnerable members of your party.

Your leadership should also have a cerebral element. Since you generally walk in the front rank, you're in a good position to decide where the party will go, so keep thinking about your group's next move. Use your *detect evil* ability to sniff out unseen dangers and be ready to deal with evil when you find it.

You can and should provide your party with moral leadership as well. Be prepared to negotiate with creatures that aren't immediately hostile, and even when you're attacked, consider why your opponent is attacking before responding with full force. Subdue foes when you can, and be chivalrous to your prisoners.

Friends in Need

Your paladin's combat ability provides a foundation for the party's overall fighting power. If you waste or misuse that ability, the whole party suffers. Likewise, the paladin needs the support of the rest of the party just to survive. So it pays for her to know how to scratch the backs of her fellow PCs.

The Party's Scout: Stealthy characters such as rogues, rangers, and monks often get in over their heads. Plan to be part of the rescue party, since your healing abilities might be necessary to put an injured scout back together.

But some of the party scout's actions are likely to earn your disapproval. When they do, don't nag or become self-righteous. Instead, register your dissatisfaction without rancor and keep an eye on the scout in the future. If you've done a good job of making your paladin admirable, your quiet displeasure should prove most compelling.

The Party's Arcane Spellcaster: Wizards, sorcerers, and bards can pack a real punch with their spells, and they often serve as the party's heavy artillery. But since such characters usually have poor Armor Classes and very few hit points, they must rely on you to keep the opposition at a distance.

The Party's Divine Spellcaster: Get friendly and stay friendly with your party's cleric or druid. This character's healing spells can keep you on your feet so that you can continue meting out justice to evildoers.

Some Key Equipment

A paladin relies heavily on her gear, so it pays to collect the right equipment. Below are some essential pieces to pack.

- **Armor:** If you're a paladin, it generally pays to get the best armor you can afford because you'll need that boost to your Armor Class. Plan to carry a shield (heavy or tower) unless you want to use a two-handed weapon. And don't overlook other defensive items, such as *rings of protection* and *amulets of natural armor*. Several lesser items that stack usually give you better protection, and at a cheaper price, than one big item.

If you do a lot of wilderness adventuring, consider some backup armor, such as suit of studded leather (or a mithral chain shirt, if you can afford it) that you can wear at night. If you try to sleep in heavy armor, you'll have penalties the next day. But if you sleep in your skivvies, you'll be in trouble if you're attacked in the night.

- **Primary Melee Weapon:** Choose a martial or exotic weapon with a good damage rating and a decent capacity for making critical hits. A bastard sword or dwarven waraxe is a great choice because you can wield it in one hand if you take the right feat. Doing so lets you deal significant damage while still gaining the Armor Class benefits of a shield. For sheer damage-dealing ability, though, nothing beats a two-handed weapon, such as a greatsword or greataxe.
- **Backup Melee Weapon:** Always have a light weapon or two handy. A light slashing weapon, such as a dagger or hand axe, can help get you out of a tight spot (for example, being swallowed whole by a big monster). It also pays to have a hefty weapon on hand in case you lose your primary one or find that it isn't effective. Make sure this weapon deals a different kind of damage than your primary weapon does. For example, if you normally use a bastard sword (a slashing weapon), consider a morningstar (which deals both bludgeoning and piercing damage) as a backup.
- **Ranged Weapon:** Evil lurks everywhere, and it won't always be within melee reach. A ranged weapon also makes up nicely for your general lack of mobility. A composite bow is a great choice because you can spend a little extra money on it and add your Strength bonus to damage.
- **Backup Spells:** You never know when you'll run out of spells. Furthermore, you never know when you'll need a particular spell -- and need it very badly. So it pays to keep some spellcasting power in reserve via a collection of scrolls, wands, or both. Scrolls are a great way to carry along useful spells (such as *create*

water or *lesser restoration*) that you might not use in every adventure. Best of all, if you have the Scribe Scroll feat, you can make scrolls yourself, though doing so uses up time, money, and experience points. Wands are useful for bread-and-butter spells that you use often, especially healing spells (such as *cure light wounds*) and combat boosters (such as *bless weapon*).

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies, and he served as the sage of *Dragon Magazine* for eighteen years. Skip is a codesigner of the **D&D** 3rd edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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